

# NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release  
October 12, 2006

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## Springfield Man Convicted of Drug and Firearm Offenses

Springfield, IL - A Springfield man faces up to life in prison after he was convicted of drug and firearms offenses. Rodger A. Heaton, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois, announced that a jury deliberated less than two hours before returning verdicts of guilty on Tuesday, October 10, 2006 against Spencer Harris, age 37, of 1844 South 14th, Springfield, Illinois. Spencer was convicted of one count of distributing cocaine on June 22, 2006; one count of distributing five or more grams of cocaine base "crack" on June 29, 2006; one count of possession with intent to distribute five or more grams of crack cocaine on July 6, 2006; one count of being a felon in possession of a firearm on July 6, 2006; and one count of possessing a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime on July 6, 2006.

Harris was arrested on July 6, 2006, the same day a search warrant was executed at Harris' residence on 14th Street and a residence Harris shared with his girlfriend on the 1900 block of Greentree, both in Springfield.

The trial began Wednesday, October 4, continued on October 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, and concluded on October 10, 2006. At trial, the government presented evidence that Harris sold a cooperating witness approximately ½ ounce of cocaine and crack cocaine on June 22 and 29, 2006, respectively. The government also presented evidence that on July 6, 2006, Harris possessed a 9 mm semi-automatic handgun loaded with 11 rounds in furtherance of his drug trafficking activity. The serial number and identifying marks of the handgun had been ground off. Prior to July 6, Harris had been convicted of a felony (federal felony conviction for being a felon in possession of a firearm in 1993). Harris has two prior felony convictions for either a drug trafficking or violent crime making him eligible for consideration as a career offender at sentencing.

U.S. District Judge Jeanne E. Scott scheduled sentencing for February 26, 2007, at 1:30 p.m. The offense carries a mandatory minimum statutory penalty of 15 years; however, the maximum penalty is natural life in prison.

The charge is the result of an investigation under the Project Safe Neighborhoods program by the Springfield Police Department, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Patricia A. McInerney and Gregory M. Gilmore are prosecuting the case.

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